794 No one may remain a member of the ndomo after his circumcision. It is said that an individual who would continue his activity in the ndomo would acquire a double wanzo.

/176/ Chapter 7

RITES

•771 The rites of the Bambara are very complex and often involve several institutions. The following descriptions are not of a general character as the rites admit perceptible variations from one village to the next, variations of which the individuals concerned are aware, for there is no absolute rule for any institution or ceremony.

Nevertheless, their various manifestations, which adhere to this flexibility of thought, testify to the unity of the cosmological and religious representations. When a Bambara is invited to be a spectator [514] to the ceremonies of neighboring villages, he is frequently informed about this or that aspect of the ritual which is unfamiliar to him during the drinking parties which follow. In fact, tradition demands that the preceding ceremony be commented upon and explained in front of the beer jars. But the unity of the representations is such that, according to the declaration of a qualified informant, "whoever knows the principles and mechanisms may deduce from them, without explanations, the meaning and symbolism of a ritual which has not been commented upon."

On the other hand, the rites are symbolic even in their most insignificant manifestations: time and place, form of the ritual objects, aspect of the victims, repetition of formulas or prayers, mimicry of the participants, the wearing of certain secular or priestly garments, etc. A very great subtlety presides over the choice of details. It is thus that, during the stages of creation, the supernatural powers have established, organized, and reorganized the universe (skies, spaces, lands) following the itineraries which include "the cardinal directions and angles." The rites in which the cardinal points occur include gesticulation which, depending upon the power

• 771 considered, follows the chronological order used by this power in the beginning. Similarly, the various skies where Faro reigns are invoked according to their role and the aims of the petitioners /177/ who appeal to them in many cases with very long prayers.

In order not to overload this discussion, a very limited number of rites are described below. Among them, an important place is reserved for those concerning the person (see Ch. 3), which relate to birth, circumcision and excision, funeral rites, and the cult of ancestors. For each one of these the respective positions of the elements composing the individuality at different times have been pointed out.

The rites relating to the ordinary which come next, affect the collective life of the family and village. They concern the residences, the crossroads, and the public squares. They have a very definite character of a gathering together and redistribution of individual forces for the good of the community.

The rain rituals, also collective, which involve the Komo and the Kworè, present a typical example of Bambara symbolism.

Finally, the rituals for "the renewal of the year" have still a more general character: they show close ties uniting individual and community to the cosmos (1).

1. The agricultural rites have not been touched upon in this work as they will be the object of a detailed description in: S. de Ganay, Techniques et rites de l'agriculture chez les Bambara (to be published).

In addition, most of the rituals are duplicated by a series of games of a cosmogonic character which relate to the stages of creation and to its past, present, or future states. See p. 54.

I. Rites Concerning the Person

Birth and Name-Giving

844 273 271 From the moment of his birth, a newborn is washed with millet beer mixed with water. The beer has a purifying quality and the

775 their death and more or less far away from the place where they died, have been seen living a new life.

The dya is then, as it were, the essence of individuality, 774 and the body, its material expression, takes on forms that are 775 somehow characteristic of the dya.

The dya is a fluid which has its own attributes. There are sorcerers who are thought to know ways to capture the dya, especially for the purpose of using it to make idols that can talk.

It is further believed that a part of the dya is indestructible because it is made up of another fluid common to all nature, which the Bambara call nyama.

The nyama has no shape, but it retains, as it were, a trace of the identity it had during its incarnation; so the name borne by the person who was animated by this nyama has an irresistible attraction for the nyama and the latter is forced to obey anyone who knows how to use this propensity to make it carry out his wishes. After death, the nyama retains human contacts and, in certain respects, continues to behave as it did during its corporeal lifetime. Its manifestations are seen by the Bambara in matters of vengeance: the nyama of an ancestor is especially attentive to the manner in which the ancestor's wishes are being carried out and it is relentless in punishing those who fail to comply. It is the nyama of the fa (father of a family or patriarch) who torments the accursed; it is the nyama of the victim who pursues the murderer; and it is the nyama of anything tabooed that strikes down the impious.

So it is that, for the Bambara, a human being is composed of a corporeal body (su) which serves as the outward envelope (fure) of a fluid element (dya), whose subtle essence (nyama) is merely a part of the universal energy which permeates all nature.

771 [122] To a certain extent the Bambara applies the foregoing ideas on human beings to all that surrounds him. However, it should not be assumed from this that he conceives of everything as being made exactly in his own image. To express abstract ideas, he uses concrete terms which may, however, give a false impression. There is no doubt whatever that the Bambara differentiates between himself and animals; he also distinguishes from vegetables or minerals.

771 In any case, these are questions which he does not ask or which, at least, he has not considered in any way that would cause him to make logical, even if fragmentary, syntheses. His words and his acts are indications and sometimes even guide-posts for us, but how uncertain and misleading they can be! And, in the observation of current facts, how many at least seeming contradictions there are! However, in the main, the analysis given in the paragraphs above represents the basis of Bambara dogma, since everything happens in reality as if the Bambara were living in accordance with these principles.

761 772 That being the case, life results from the union of the two parts of the body, while death is a result of their separation. Whence come these two elements and who it is that decides upon their union? No answer is possible. The Bambara say, merely, that certain persons are reincarnations. Precautions [844] taken during pregnancy and delivery show that childbirth is one of those mysteries against which taboos must be observed as a protection. The frequent and readily believed stories about [845] women giving birth to monsters -- usually animals -- bear witness to the affinities which, in the minds of the Bambara, exist between all creatures. But nothing specific is said about what precedes and determines the birth of a child.

562 778 This is a secret to which the Bambara are, of course, not indifferent. It is evidenced in the fact that women, through whom man comes into the world, are held to be doubtful creatures, at the very least, partly because of menstruation, which makes a woman impure, and partly because of the mysterious travail she endures during the delivery of a child (1).

[774]

1. Women are also susceptible of being possessed continuously by a spirit (see the story of the Déni-bo Ba, p. 123). That is why, when a woman is several times widowed, she is suspected of being possessed by a jealous spirit who kills off her husbands. She is often even thought to be herself a sorceress.

787 The kolon' kala is used in the same way to discover stolen or lost objects. In that case it is wrapped in a loincloth belonging to the victim of the theft, along with something equally personal.

What are we to conclude from these divinatory practices? Are oracles based entirely on charlatanism and trickery? This would be a failure to recognize the credulity of the practitioners, most often the first to believe in their own practices.

771 Religion and Magic. There is nothing more involved, incoherent and contradictory than the cult customs of the Bambara. In order to give a clear picture of the essential traits, we shall follow an outline based on the distinction which becomes apparent on close analysis.

It can be stated that these people always honor the manes, the nyana dugu-da-siri and some other nyana, without presuming to impose human will upon them. Indeed, it may even be said that the Bambara make an effort to behave in a manner presumed to be pleasing to them.

However, the majority of the nyana are spirits suborned by man and serving his will.

Finally, there are appropriate rites which make it possible for humans to exploit a portion of the universal energy and to use it as they wish.

771 789 Let us say that the cult of the manes and of the independent nyana are what constitutes the religion of the Bambara, while the subjection of the spirits and the exploitation of universal energy properly constitute magic, which in its most feared form is called sorcery.

This distinction is obviously arbitrary. There is no custom that is not in some measure impregnated with magic, and this is so true that it is uncertain whether one should consider [139] religion to be a sort of purified magic and magic a perversion of religion or even its parasite.

Without seeking to decide this question, we shall simply point out that there is often a clear line of demarcation between religion and magic. All one needs in order to see the difference is to compare the cult of the manes with the practices of sorcery

771 789 used to capture the spirits of the dead. The native clearly shows how much he respects the cult of the manes and, on the contrary, how much he is disturbed and terrified by the practices of the suba (1). However, many practices cannot be so clearly

1. See Chapter 7 concerning the suba.

differentiated because they have elements of both religion and magic. Such practices are held to be allowable and even desirable, illicit and hateful, depending on the point of view and the places, circumstances and persons involved.

If we keep in mind the foregoing remarks and limit ourselves to the most characteristic traits, it is possible to establish a parallel between religion and magic among the Blacks.

Both acknowledge the existence of an invisible world which is everywhere in contact with everything subject to our senses. But while religion in principle assumes man's dependence vis-à-vis this invisible world, magic operates on the theory that anything that exists comes within the power of "the one who knows" (don'na ba).

Since the Master of the Universe appears not to take much interest in what he has created, his creatures do not honor him but, rather, have recourse to the Spirits and Powers (nyana) who are willing to take a hand in human affairs. Religion organizes, for the benefit of these benevolent nyana, a cult designed to make sure of their good offices. Magic, on the other hand, forces them to execute its will.

[775] Religion and magic both believe firmly in the dual nature of man: a finite body and a soul which survives this body. When death comes, this soul goes off to join the family of manes, who are bodiless souls like it. From that vantage point the soul continues to watch over the affairs of its relatives still in the world of men. Religion regards the manes as guardian spirits and strives to make sure the continuity of their [140] will and wishes. Magic treats (1) these incorporeal souls like the

1. Especially by means which give magic the character of sorcery.

771 nyana and seeks to use them for utilitarian ends.
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By virtue of the beliefs on which it is based, religion engenders a certain degree of morality. Magic uses its knowledge to exploit the Universe for material profit.

In both camps there are initiates. Whereas the most
[791] famous adepts in magic live in a kind of isolation, where they jealously keep the secret of their practices and where they exist apart from human societies which at once honor and fear them,
[794] religion, on the other hand, displays its cults, if not exactly publicly, at least in the circle of the faithful. The latter, since they are usually completely familiar with the ceremonies of the cult and with the high-priests, are the masters and most venerated members of society.

Religion receives its most reliable support from the natural family and from the communities derived from that family. Legal magic has copied these organizations in the form of brotherhoods, which Europeans call "secret societies," a kind of spiritual family in which the members are only gradually admitted to all secrets.

Whereas the religion of the manes forms the strongest link that holds together the members of a community, and represents the framework of the society, magic on the other hand cares little for this union and in fact helps to disrupt it by the hatred it engenders. Thanks to magic, the individual feels competent to challenge the community and never fails to do so.

Let us look more closely into the traits characteristic of religion and those characteristicof magic.

By studying all that concerns especially the patriarchal and family communities and the associations growing out of these communities we shall be able to see the place occupied by the religion of the manes and of the spirits, as well as the effect of magic upon the basic manifestations of the life of these communities.

789 Since magic, in a sense, envelops every act of the native, it seems to us essential, at the start, to look into its characteristics so as to facilitate the understanding of all that is to follow, which is impreganted by magic in so many ways.

596 614 787 It is the duty of the fa to see to the cult. He projects everything that happens to him personally to the supernatural plane so as to come to conclusions that will guide his own conduct. He discerns in the most ordinary dreams indications of what will please the dead. Furthermore, the people around him point out the signs of divine will that they have observed. If, as happens in great houses, the fa is obliged to turn over part of his responsibility to the family gods to one of his confidantes, the latter will not fail to keep him informed of anything significant that may be revealed.

[577] Thus, daily life is unceasingly dominated by the supernatural, and every important event is conditioned by these beliefs. This is readily seen in all the family institutions: birth, circumcision, marriage, and death.

[577] It follows that the moral behavior of the family is a concern of the fa. Whenever something abnormal or painful occurs, the fa looks into it. Do the dead perhaps have reason to be dissatisfied? Have they been neglected or offended? He questions them, and if he finds confirmation for his suspicions, he at once seeks to appease the manes in whatever way they desire. If the trouble persists, he investigates further, and sometimes everyone in the house is questioned or, if one prefers, made to confess, even infants. Could one of them, moved by ill feeling, have uttered maledictions when invoking the dead?

614 596 783 [578] When the fa himself is ill, this general confession is virtually obligatory. This is because the absolute authority of a fa can hardly fail to arouse hatred, and hatred, a bad counselor, makes people resort to magic to rob the more powerful of life. Fear that the elder's "clairvoyance" will discover the wickedness in the depths of one's soul and punish it usually induces the guilty person to obtain a pardon for his wrongdoing by confessing it, and then everything returns to normal.

596 614 [763] Upon the death of the fa, it is the first duty of his successor to try to discover, by any means, the causes of death and to avenge it if need be.

Everything which the old fa was wont to honor, which forms the spiritual treasure [180] of the family, must also be

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614 On the other hand, it closely resembles the clan of the Khasso region, on which we have published a detailed study (1).
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1. See Les Khassonké in the series Revue du Monde musulman.

Chapter 6

Islam

1. Islamism and Paganism

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797 It is a commonplace to say that the Bambara are implacable enemies of Islam.

However, history shows that for centuries the Bambara have been living in contact with Islam, that they maintain close relations with native communities of Islamic converts, and that they are willing to seek the good offices of marabouts of all races and ranks.

Are they, besides, as refractory to conversion as they are said to be? The chiefs of the clans of Ségou and Kaarta and some of their near connections and intimates, as well as other notables, have been practicing Islam. The Somono, who are of Bambara extraction, are faithful believers and, what is even more significant, they are fervent propagandists for Islam.

Actually, paganism and Islamism are not mutually antagonistic dogmas in the minds of the Bambara or of the Sudanese people in general, as many Europeans believe and state it to be. In these regions, Islamization has a counterpart which prepares the way for it and explains it, and that is the "sudanization" of Islam.

During his sojourn in Kaarta Raffenel tells of an interesting incident: "I had as a landlord a blacksmith named Niany, a grotesque personage, excessively naive and with a corresponding sense of logic, but a good fellow and very amusing. One day he

771 came to me to complain that [332] my Negroes were using a
777 satala (1) to take water from his jug.

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1. A kind of saucepan made of copper or tin, of European origin, used by Moslem Sudanese for their ritual ablutions.

" 'What difference does that make to you?' I asked him.

" 'What difference does it make!' he answered with an angry air.

"And with that he favored me with the following astonishing line of reasoning:

"'Now you see, I am not a (Moslem) marabout and if the marabouts take water from my jar with the satala, the water that remains in the jar will necessarily be sanctified because it came into contact with that vessel. My children and I drink this water and, since we don't know how to salaam and don't fast, and since we eat pork, God (2) will punish us for having failed

2. That is, in Niany's mind, the nyana called Ngalla (Allah) by the Bambara.

to obey his orders. For, after all, any water that has touched a satala makes a marabout (3) of the person who drinks it. That is

3. That is, an initiate of Ngalla (Allah).

what I heard from my father."

776 The net result is that, on the whole, Ngalla (Allah) is regarded as one of the nyana which we have mentioned and for which the Bambara has a superstitious respect without for that matter being a worshiper. He avoids any contact with all that concerns the nyana, not because of hostility, but for fear of incurring its wrath on account of some impurity. Just as he may call upon any convenient nyana for aid, so he asks the help of

777 787 Ngalla through his priests, the marabouts. At other times he thinks he will get into Ngalla's good graces by taking part in the great Moslem festivals and by imitating the visible rites (4)

> 4. In the tale of the Hyena, given later, there is an example of this mimicry in the way in which those who follow the Hyena each pretend to be the nyana discovered by the Hyena (see Chapter 7 [not translated]).

of the faithful. He has not the faintest doubt but that he can produce the same effects as they do.

So it is that the pagan, deriving from Islam whatever his own concepts can make use of, "Sudanizes" it in the process. As a result, between the two poles of Islam and paganism, there exists an infinity of intermediate states which link the two and which, depending on the angle of observation, sometimes look like an Islamization of the Sudanese and, at other times, like a Sudanization of Islam.

Father Niany, of the blacksmiths' caste, was one of those [333] individuals who, being versed in the practice of native occultism, consider Islam as a rival Hermetism until the day when they realize that it can provide them with useful new magic power. Many are the blacksmiths, magicians like Niany, who have become Moslems for the purpose of getting their hands on the arsenal of magic which Islam brings into these lands.

787 [177] So it is that all the native brotherhoods have adopted divination by geomancy which was introduced by the Moslems and there is not a Bambara who does not on occasion consult the geomancer, known as laturudala or kenyelala (1) or the

> 1. Derived from kenye meaning "sand," and la meaning "to place" or "to write on." Therefore it means "the one who writes on the sand."

787 177 bugurigala (2). These three words are sufficient in themselves

> 2. Derived from buguri meaning "dust," and da meaning "to place" or "to write on." Therefore it means "the one who writes on the dust."

to illustrate the process of Sudanization. Although the first comes from a corruption of the Arabic word el tereb (earth), the other two are strictly Bambara in all respects. Besides, the manner in which the natives have altered the practice of geomancy is an illustration of the same process.

● 771 797 It may therefore be concluded that, in certain respects, Islam has strengthened paganism. For example, the pagans commonly believe that an illiterate geomancer, who is nevertheless an expert in this type of divination, will obtain the same results as a learned marabout who is guided by the book of Er Zenati. As a result, a well-known laturadala enjoys special prestige because of the fact that his prognostications are corroborated by a book, and the same fact accounts in part for the influence of the priests of the brotherhoods.

We are thus able to verify the contacts between Islam and the paganism of the Bambara who are the subject of this study.

693 The historical tales related in the foregoing show the continuous relations which existed between the native chiefs and the pious and renowned marabouts. Whenever a legal dispute arose which could not be settled by pagan arbitration, the last recourse was an appeal for judgment or conciliation to a marabout, who was always sought out and greeted with deference. Mamari, Tonmassa, Ngolo and Ma-n-son's sons all had occasion to make such appeals in some most embarrassing situations.

[334] Further, on occasions when they hoped to bring off some questionable deal or to improve their prospects, the chiefs were also wont to call on a marabout. Mamari did so against the Massa-si Foro-koro and so did Ngolo when he was anxious to make sure that his fame would survive him.

In matters of judicial arbitration, it appears that the marabout derives his authority rather more, perhaps, from his

693 reputation for integrity and impartiality than for his knowledge of the books. In other matters, however, his Moslem esoterism is the quality most highly valued.

771 It is assumed, besides, that the high priests and other persons of note should be initiated into Islamic matters, which 797 seem to be regarded simply as a branch of occultism to which such persons are especially addicted. The Kouloubali, the Dyara, and other lords of the clans of Ségou and Kaarta have practiced Islamism (1) without betraying paganism; on the

1. In the Sudanese manner, of course.

contrary, by adding to it the luster of these foreign mysteries, it can be said that they have "Sudanized" Islam as completely as possible. Neither Mamari nor Ngolo, for example, was in the least embarrassed by his Moslem practices. Both remained high priests of their tutelary idols and simply borrowed (2) the external

2. This borrowing is done with the same awkwardness as that seen when a Black puts on a suit of European clothes which happens to come into his possession. The ease with which an occasional native can adapt it is exceptional.

"manner" of Islam.

The bloodthirsty Dékoro was a Moslem of the same type. He was preparing to perform his ablutions, followed by his faithful blacksmith, at the very moment when he was assassinated by Tonmassa. And the blacksmith was actually carrying one of the satala which father Niany regarded as so compromising.

614 Naturally, the adoption of Islam was never allowed to 797 create any political deviation which might compromise the interests of the clan. That would be treason, and such was the case for Touro-koro Mari. He was put to death not because he was converted to Islam, but because he had enfeoffed himself to El Hadj Omar to such an extent that the clan's independence was threatened.

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797 It should be noted that this acceptance of things Islamic was not imposed on the Bambara by fanatical or warlike converters; in any case it [335] goes back to a time that was long before the exploits of the "people of Macina" and of "those of Fouta."

Mungo Park says that, when he passed through the area, half the Kaarta army were Moslems, and we are even better informed by Raffenel. Of course, it is in general only a kind of "Sudanized" Islam, but that is already a very important step.

Raffenel observes that the people of the Massa-si clan added a much-feared nyana of the boli to the cult of the ancestors which is common to all the Bambara. He further points out
[776] that all the Bambara recognize Ngalla (Allah) and that, although they practice Islam only casually, they distinguish between believers and infidels among themselves. The Kouloubali especially consider themselves to be Moslems and affect to behave as such.

From this derives a curious spectacle giving evidence of a kind of dualism that is very suggestive. The general assembly of what one might call the ruling elements of the Massa-si clan took place at the festival of Bafram, and the Kouloubali, the chiefs of the clan, their relatives, their allies, the principal slave leaders and other dignitaries never failed to attend and to take part in the ceremonies in honor of their clan's tutelary nyana, since the meeting was especially devoted to a renewal of the oath of loyalty to this same idol. Now Raffenel reports that the Moslem festival of the sacrifice of the lamb was also held in the midst of the general rejoicing. It was, to be sure, directed by the Soninké marabouts, but most of the Bambara took part in it, imitating the motions of the officiating priests to the best of their ability and often sacrificing a lamb.

And Raffenel remarks: "Kaffirs though they are, the Bambara nevertheless show respect for the marabouts. Thus, for the festival of Bafram, the Sarakole (1) marabouts, otherwise known

1. Who call themselves Soninké
but whom the Bambara call Marka.

• 771 797 as sila, also gather at Keghé (2) and address prayers to heaven

2. Then the royal residence of the Massa-si chiefs.

for the preservation of the king's life and the glory of his reign. Custom requires the king to make rich presents to the sila on this occasion."

[336] This dualism, which appears strange and which has sometimes been interpreted as a result of Islamic influence during an earlier period of Moslem supremacy, is, on the contrary and without any doubt whatever, an essential characteristic of the native milieu. In this milieu, in theory, all religions can flourish without hindrance and even with the benevolent assent of the faithful believers of the various sects, if one may so describe the adepts in these innumerable nyana. It is certain that all religions, a priori and by their very nature, enjoy particular esteem among the Blacks.

[609] In the mind of the native, a foreigner is particularly dangerous because he is assumed to possess mysterious magic powers. Many Sudanese legends bear witness to the Black's belief that encounters with foreigners are accompanied by combats whose outcome depends entirely on magic. As a result of this state of mind, as soon as it is apparent that the stranger's cult brings no calamities in its wake, not only is the cult tolerated, but some of the natives even adopt it, at first as a kind of addition to their own cults and then gradually they become converts.

Islam has also profited from this state of mind. With the external and public manifestations of his cult the Moslem easily impresses the Bambara who, as we have seen, are constantly obsessed with the supernatural. How could they fail to be struck by this divinity called Allah, who is endlessly proclaimed all day long, and by religious observances which are displayed before the public: ablutions, prayers pronounced aloud in as strange language, rosaries, mosques which are often monumental, great and impressive ceremonies?

Further, the fact that Islam is supported by the written word of its books gives it an element of certainty that is lacking in the native cults.

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797 Finally, there is no doubt that a learned Moslem, who is well-dressed, who does not get drunk (1) and who behaves with

1. At least in public.

dignity (1) [see footnote above] greatly impresses the pagans; his mere example creates a favorable atmosphere for Islam.

Therefore some of the natives, trying to imitate outward appearances, find themselves drawn toward Islam, whose rites they practice without even having any desire to be converted. The mere fact of dressing in white, wearing a white cap, going about [337] in sandals, conspicuously telling one's beads, salaaming while muttering incomprehensible words or continually repeating "Allah Akoubar," and participating in important ceremonies, suffices to give an individual an elegant air without in the least interfering with pagan traditions.

The Islamism noted by Mungo Park in the Bambara army and among the Kouloubali and other dignitaries, is an example of this simple formalism. On the other hand, the Bambara, without exception, [789] are eternally on the lookout for magic formulas: talismans, amulets, remedies and procedures of all kinds. And Islam provides a whole arsenal of magic which is very popular with the Blacks.

In addition to all these attractions, Islam seems to the Bambara to have institutions which are not basically opposed to their own. It tolerates polygamy, divorce, repudiation and slavery. As practiced over a long period by the natives, who have skilfully Sudanized it, it is adapted without difficulty to all sorts of situations. The blacksmith, that master of accultism, scarcely has to change at all when he becomes a marabout; he merely acquires some new manners which enable him to preside at birth, circumcision, marriage, death or other social or family ceremonies in the name of Islam. However, this is an Islam so close to paganism that it differs only in name. Allah, under the name of Ngalla, has taken his place in the Bambara pantheon alongside the other nyana, and the only distinction is that he has his own "manner."

771 Incidentally, this "manner" possesses, under some cir-
797 cumstances, advantages which encourage adhesion to Islam.
Slaves belonging to true Moslem believers do well to give clear
[567] evidence of their new faith if they wish to obtain their freedom.
Ngolo made use of this means according to the chronicle of
Ségou.

Women and, in general, the "weak people" often claim conversion -- only rarely deep or sincere -- in order to escape from the arbitrary and rigorous nature of the custom governing them.

2. The agents of Islam

797 As regards the people with whom we are here concerned, it can be said that the center, which directly or indirectly has [338] had the greatest influence in spreading Islam, is the city of Dia (1).

1. A city on the left bank of the Niger, in the present-day province of Macina..

Dia is certainly the oldest metropolis of Islam in western Sudan, but this was an accommodating kind of Islam, which compromised easily with native customs and gave a large role to magic.

"The characteristic of the marabouts of Dia is their scarcely disguised tendency to rely on Islamic magic. The city has always been considered the great center for the production of amulets in the valley of the Middle Niger" (Marty, Études sur l'Islam et les tribus du Soudan [Studies on Islam and the tribes of the Sudan] Vol. 4).

These marabouts belong to very diverse races, but those of the Marka are dominant and with them should be considered their confreres, the Bozo, on whose training the Marka have always exerted a preponderant influence. The Somono marabouts usually come from one or the other of these two races.

All of them are linked in one way or another with high priests from Moorish or Peul Islam and, through them or their emissaries, are allied with one or another of the brotherhoods.

177 basis of judicial decisions, and the Chambers also give advice on the
444 program of agricultural improvement undertaken by the administration and the welfare societies.

In Senegal, there are Chambers of Commerce, Agriculture and Industry at Dakar, Saint-Louis, Thiès, Kaolack, and Ziguinchor; in the Sudan, at Bamako; in Guinea and the Ivory Coast, at Conakry and Abidjan.

e. Work Regulation. Unions

464 Sparsely populated, West Africa lacks manpower. A decree of October 22, 1925, and an order of the Governor General of March 29, 1926, set the conditions by which workers could be recruited and work contracts established: salary, bonus, food, lodgings, medical care ... Individual or collective disputes between employers and employees are taken before arbitration boards presided over by a French employer and a native assistant judge.

An act of April 2, 1932, regulates the work of women and
464 children. One of March 11, 1937, organizes the trade unions, and
467 a decree of March 20, 1937, the native professional associations. Others regulate collective agreements applying to work. The National Assembly has voted the Overseas Work Code which is beginning to be applied. African unions have developed a great deal in the course of these last years; there are six African unions in the Sudan. The complexity of labor problems has led to the creation at Dakar of an office to inspect manpower problems, this office being attached to the General Bureau of Political, Administrative, and Social Affairs.

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CHAPTER 7

CULTURAL ASPECTS

I. Religion

771 One can never insist too much on the importance of religion. It governs the entire social, political, artistic, and even economic life of the country. No institution can be understood without knowing

the religious system which animates and explains it. The Bambara is an essentially religious being; all his acts are dictated by ritual duties or taboos, and he finds his true liberty only within the rules transmitted to him by tradition. To destroy his religion amounts to destroying his whole social structure as well as his soul. Inversely, every transformation of techniques will have grave repercussions, not only on the material life of the individual, but also on his inner life. In fact, the religion is itself part of a whole cosmological and metaphysical system which explains and orders every existing thing. The simplest and poorest object is a reflection of complex concepts which leave nothing to chance or to imagination, and we arrive at the paradox that the technical progress and enrichment introduced by the European civilization impoverish the over-all metaphysical representation, while the social evolution ends in detaching the Bambara from his traditional religion and makes of him a rootless being who will be the prey of badly understood ideologies, foreign to his nature and to his genius.

L. Tauxier (1), pursuing the studies of Father Henry and

1. L. Tauxier, La religion bambara [Bambara Religion].

C. Monteil, has attempted a comprehensive description of Bambara beliefs. But in his exposition Bambara religion appears to be composed of disparate elements with no links between them. This impression is due in large part to the esoteric character of this religion, which certainly contains exoteric elements accessible to all, but whose fundamental principles remain known only to the elders and to the initiated who are reluctant to confide in strangers. The study of Bambara religion has been entirely renewed in these last few years by Mme. Dieterlen (2), who has known how to go beyond the superficial

2. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

knowledge we had had of this people. She has introduced us to an admirably cohesive metaphysical system and ritual organization [81] In fact, "the Bambara metaphysic and religion offer a structured whole

144 which encompasses all social, technical and economic activities" (1)
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1. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion], P.U.F., 1951.

of this people. The myths are "a sum of knowledge, wisdom, and not a series of fixed etiological recitations. One may say that they constitute a metaphysic including the knowledge of created things, as well as the principles of their state of being and of their action." (2)

2. Id., ibid.

171 Thorough investigation of other Sudanese peoples has revealed that the
771 Bambara religion is part of a pan-Sudanese system in which differences lie in the modes of expression and not in the essence of the thought.

A. Cosmogony

772 The Bambara conceive the world as a mass of active forces which man can influence. Thanks to certain techniques, the pivotal one being the blood sacrifice, man may amass or liberate these forces, may direct and orient them; in short, man may have a hand in the movement of the world and may aid it in its consciousness and accomplishment. This central role of man is explained to us by the order of creation itself, which governs all the rites to which man is subject. The Bambara conceive the world as having issued from an
773 original void which was endowed with movement (3): the gla. This

3. Passim, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

void emitted a voice which created its double, and from the couple came a humid substance, zo sumale (cold rust), which formed hard shining bodies. After a series of movements and transformations, there was an explosion between the two gla, which caused the ejection of a hard and powerful matter that vibrated as it fell. Out of this vibration came signs which settled on all the things as yet uncreated to designate them. Then, man's consciousness detached itself from the gla and settled on things to awaken their consciousness in naming them. In the

that she may speak to him freely. When the day of union comes, the wife herself prepares her husband's food; then she lies on the left side (the feminine side) and her husband on the right side, and she cannot be impregnated except by a union twice repeated.

These corporal techniques[1] are dictated and ordered by the religious imperatives which pervade the life of the Bambara from before his birth until after his death.

What we have said of the Bambara's religion and of his conception of the world enables us to understand that there cannot be for him a complete break between life and death: birth is a reincarnation; death is not destruction. This is why a man's life does not present one substantial unity but is divided into a certain number of distinct periods, each of which is inaugurated by a rite of transition that marks the death of an anterior state and the rebirth to a new life.

a. Before Birth

From the first month after his conception, the infant constitutes a person who receives a series of spiritual forces emanating from his father's side of the family and especially from the recently deceased ancestor whose name he will receive. At the same time, he inherits all of the paternal taboos, which the mother must respect during her pregnancy. It is only after his birth, at the time he receives his name, that the infant receives the spiritual forces coming from his mother's side. These forces are transmitted through the medium of the priest and the ancestors of the priest.

From then on, the infant is required to observe all the taboos of the beings who have had a part in the composition of his personality; he thus finds himself tightly bound to the society in which he will live.

b. Birth Rites

At birth the baby is washed with millet beer (1) (to purify him)

1. For all these rites, see G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

[1 i.e., sexual reproduction and childrearing; see pp. 117-119. -Ann Hyatt]

326 as well as of silver, on a wooden core. The thrones of the ancient [531] Bambara chiefs were covered in this manner. Today the golden ornaments are no longer reserved exclusively for the wives of kings. [301] Bracelets, pendants, and necklaces are produced in large quantities in a filigree work in which the Black excels.

B. Ceramics

323 The land is very rich in pottery, but Bambara men do not model clay, pottery being a woman's art. Inversely, the women do not work on statuary.

C. Painting

531 386 The Bambara paint murals on the sanctuary walls with ocher and a millet paste. The priests make these drawings periodically. The walls of the young people's huts are also decorated with symbolic motifs: calabash spoons, festoons, ladders with 22 bars, drawings of hands, lines of chevrons. The young girls come to paint these, [337] with clay from the river or with a mixture of clay and cow dung. All these geometric drawings are signs representing not only the cosmogony, but a subtle translation of all the movements of the executing artist's soul. They are a veritable form of writing.

D. Music

533 ●771 Music is a privileged art (1) because it is bound to instru-

1. Griaule, Passim, "Symbole des arts africains" [Symbol of the African Arts], Présence africaine.

ments, that is to say, to materials, to the human body by the voice and the dance, to numbers by the rhythm, to medicine, to divination, and to religion.

534 771 [106] In a report to the French Institute of Anthropology on February 18, 1948, Mme. G. Dieterlen described the structure and symbolism of the two Bambara musical instruments, the Sema guitar and the royal drum.

534 771 "The form of Bambara musical instruments is governed by a symbolism which enters into the metaphysical and religious system of this population."

a. The chief instrument is the drum, the tabale, reserved to kings and chiefs. The mythical prototype of this instrument was made of copper, a primordial metal whose vibration is likened to that of light, of sound, of water, and of speech in this population.

The instrument today is composed of two parts: a square wooden frame covered with goat's skin, which forms the body of the drum, and a detachable apron of engraved wood, in the form of a half-moon on one of its faces, which is attached to one of the drum's sides. This apron is covered with plaques of engraved and adorned wood, and, on the periphery of the rounded face, with a strap of leather trimmed with copper rings. This apron represents an ear which is at the same time that of the spirit of the air, that of the masters of sound, and that of the king. The copper rings are replicas of those worn in the ears by everybody; their role is to transmit sounds and rhythms to the eardrum.

The wooden drumstick used to beat the instrument is unusually long and anthropomorphous in form. It has a bell at one end. It represents Koumabana, the first of the eight ancestors in the Bambara pantheon who received "the Word" ...

b. The anthropomorphism of the harp [guitar?], ngoni, is very plain in the minds of its users.

The instrument's rectangular frame represents the mask of Koumabana, the ancestor who received the Word; the two side pieces are his eyes; the sound hole, his nose and his respiration; the tailpiece, his mouth and his teeth; the strings, eight in number, his words. It is also the image of his tomb, and the two rods that cross it represent the second and third ancestors who accompanied him in death. The frame also represents the face of the seer and his tomb, the two rods being the two millet stalks put in the ground with the cadaver. At the end of the handle, copper bells have the same role, technical and religious at the same time, as those attached to the apron on the drum described above.

534 787 Each sound given by each of the eight strings is a prayer. The seer plucks the strings separately, following their rank and according to the importance of the questioner and of the questions he

771 181 If the Bambara have fought to safeguard their independence, they have done so primarily to preserve their faith and keep their fetishes. They have shown such great attachment for these, that their [101] conquerors have described them as rebels and applied to them the epithet Bamba, synonym of Kafri. These religious struggles in themselves allow us to state as an indisputable fact that before the arrival of the Moslems the Bambara were animistic and sacrificed to genii. /69/

776 811 Did they have an exact and precise idea of their genii as they do now? Apparently yes, for they always reasoned using themselves as a basis of comparison so that in their minds the invisible, impalpable genii to whom they sacrificed had a striking resemblance to man. It is not a man, and yet it is one, they say unable to define their concept or idea, ma si fa do (1).

1. Ma; "man"; si fa' "certain kind"; do; "it is."

776 782 The Moslem word djin translates this idea precisely, and the Bambara use it in everyday language; but when the day of the sacrifice comes, they become unaware of it and there remains only one word -- ma, meaning "man." When they redden with blood the bark of [824] the baobab (Adansonia digitata), the tamarind tree, the false cedar (family of the cedrelaceae), etc., to obtain the good graces and protection of the genie who dwells there, they always confer on it the title ma ("man"), and never that of djine. "Ma n'zira ba, ma n'tomi ba, ma djala ba; O great baobab man, O great tamarind tree man, O great false-cedar man!" begins the formula used by the sacrificer in offering victims and millet flour to the genie (2). They also have

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2. In /J. Henry/, "Culte des esprits chez les Bambara /Spirit Worship among the Bambara/," Anthropos, Vol. III, No. 4 (1908), p. 1 /p. 702/, note 1, there is an error in translation.

111 The better one knows the Bambara, the more one studies their 177 beliefs in the light of their practices, considering them from their own way of thinking, seeing, feeling, and envisaging things, the more one is convinced that they owe none of their concepts to the Moslems. They have only taken from their conquerors certain words /82/ from the Koran, and these they have adopted to express themselves. They are words which corresponded to their ideas and which, being foreign to their language, remained terms that conceal.

112 It is a curious and surprising fact that certain Moslem truths 177 suited to make an impression on their minds, such as hell, paradise, the judgment of the soul followed by reward or punishment, the end of the world, etc., have always left them cold and indifferent. Had they, perhaps, lost this concept by the time of the Moslems' arrival so that all this was new to him?

What does hell matter to the Bambara! Should they fear this 112 consuming fire compared to which ours would be only the remains from a seventh washing (1)? To begin with, they believe in the reincarnation

1. Definition of hell: A douga ko wolonoula, min bi to a wolonoula ko, an tassouma flé nin yé, literally: "it to extinguish washing seventh that which is left to it seventh (washing) after our fire, look, that is it."

of souls, and this belief protects them from all these tortures, and if some Negroes think of hell, they think of it without trembling. To deserve it, one must insult the gnéna or djiné, or the gnâ (boli, sétané), or be a monster to the point of denying all the laws of justice and hospitality. The occasions for sacrificing to the gnéna and to the gnâ are too frequent always to go unnoticed, their fears of the fetishes are too numerous for anyone continuously to refuse the hen and the kola nut to the invisible tyrants. And is there any monster here below whose heart is not at one time or another moved, touched, or seized with compassion for the weak? Where is the rough, rude being who is ashamed to offer a glass of water to the passing traveler or, even

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whole circle in the dry season. For example, the master of a Nama will give an account, and the storyteller will take up the refrain, which always ends: "I have told you truly, the Nama can refrain from evil, but it is capable only of evil (a ka fari, a ka djougou ko djougou). It is evil, very evil!"

776 theless refrain from an evil act and thus indirectly grant a blessing to human beings. The words of the formula in the sacrifices to the gnéna and the gnâ seem identical, and yet, when one has understood the inmost feelings of the Bambara soul, one sees all the difference between them. To one as to the other the Negroes say: "Ka dji d'amma (give us water), ka mousoou d'amma (give us wives), ka nafolo d'amma (give us wealth), etc." But while in speaking to the first they actually ask for water, wives, etc., they make an indirect request to the second, so that their words mean: "Do nothing to keep us from having wives," "do nothing to keep us from having water," etc. In expressing himself this way he uses all his cunning, and all his deceit comes to the surface and is revealed. Yes, he really deserves the epithet that neighboring tribes have given him and of which he is proud; it is misi bo, "cow dung," -- dry on the outside but limp and soft inside, so that it is squashed when it is stepped on. His inner feeling when he addresses the boli is this: "O Spirits, evil genii, you are capable only of evil; may your hatred not attack me or those who are dear to me, may it all be for my enemies and those that can harm me!" /130/

2. The Legend of the Boli

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This is a very curious legend, for it makes the boli come from Mecca, the holy city! To understand it better, let us remember in passing that Islam has only made the Bambara more attached to their idols. They have died in order to keep them; they answered the

771 798 778 "believe or die" of the Moslems by taking up their spears, and when they were conquered, reduced to servitude, and unable to continue their worship openly, they remained true to the faith they received from their ancestors. Severed heads became the prey of vultures, and spilled blood flowed, but those that survived only became hardened. The Moslem conquerors, tired of striking and in need of slaves and manpower, had to admit their defeat in the field of religion.

Some fell away from the idols (slaves, and some rich people seeking to safeguard their lives and possessions), but their apostasy was strictly external and a lie, for they shouted the formula but in secret devoted themselves to their bloody rites, imbuing their children with their own faith and not that of their masters. A lie has never [517] been difficult for the Bambara; to know how to lie is for them more than half a virtue. Thus, when the right to freedom was proclaimed [567] in 1907, I was not at all surprised to see that out of nearly 5,000 slaves who spontaneously set themselves free, the majority returned to their homes or to the land of their fathers, forgot the formula, and declared themselves to be fetishists. They did not get initiated then since they already had been (1).

1. Those who took back their own freedom in 1907 were all slaves of the Moslems. The "Peulls" /Fulani/, a shepherd people, saw almost all their slaves escape. The Bambara in slavery kept their traditions as well as they could; in the Negro village of Biskra I found sons of the Bambara who did not know their own language and were fanatical Moslems, yet kept their tattoos, sacrificed to the family boli handed down by their fathers, danced the dance of the korodouga, and used the Bambara formulas and songs although they no longer understood them.

198 Since all the Bambara could not be made to submit to shameful servitude, the Moslems were satisfied to impose a tax, to forbid 771 public worship of the idols, and, with sheathed sword, sought to make 778 converts by persuasion. Their caravans were quick to cover the country, preaching Islam in all places both favorable and unfavorable, but the mass of the people could not be approached. In order to give /131/ their beliefs a rational basis, they always did everything in the name of "Alla, " "Stamboul" (the Sultan of Constantinople), and "Makka (Mecca), and said to the conqueror: "All true belief comes from Mecca (Makka); it is the center of all religious life, so why do you fight so hard against our boli? They all come from Mecca. God has given you the formula: 'there is no Divinity other than God and Mohammed is His prophet'; for you He prescribes ablutions, Friday rest, etc.. Keep your formula and shout it! To us Bambara He has given the boli and bloody sacrifices, so why do you want to take from us our treasures that are hungry for blood?" I do not doubt that we owe 773 our "legend" to the discussions which arose between the m'rabet (the 776 marabout, or Moslem priest) and the gnâtigi, or bolitigi. Here it is 194 as I so often heard it told by bold old men:

A group of youths who were devoting themselves to trade and following lady luck (ou toumbe kolo (1) gnini, "they were seeking

[136] 1. Kolo, "cowrie shells" (singular, koké), small shells used as money.

cowrie shells"), one day took the road to the east. Over mountains and valleys the little band walked and walked for a long time, and then finally they reached the great, blue, salty water, the ocean, on the shores of which lies the holy city, Mecca (Makka) (2).

[823] 2. Since the Moslems said that Mecca was located on the seacoast, and since the Bambara did not know Arabia, they believed it to be in this direction. In their minds the ocean does not have to be crossed to get there. Actually, this is the least of their worries.